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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Igor V. GOUMENNY (Ukraine)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 20 September 1996, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-first session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 7th, 8th, 10th, 13th, 15th, 17th and 46th meetings, on 15, 16, 21, 24, 29 and 31 October and 17 December 1996. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/51/SR.7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17 and 46).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on measures to enhance the utilization of conference-servicing resources (A/51/253);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on control and limitation of documentation: implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/206 (A/51/268);

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 32 and corrigendum and addendum (A/51/32 and Corr.1 and Add.1).

(d) Letter dated 19 April 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/51/125);

(e) Letter dated 6 September 1996 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/337);

(f) Letter dated 9 December 1996 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/721);

(g) Note by the Secretariat on meetings additional to the approved calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 1996-1997 (A/C.5/51/22 and Add.1 and 2).

II. CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.5/51/L.17

4. At the 46th meeting, on 17 December 1996, the representative of Bangladesh introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/51/L.17), submitted by the Chairman on the basis of informal consultations.

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/51/L.17 without a vote (see para. 7).

6. Before the adoption of the draft resolution statements were made by the representative of Mexico and the representative of the Secretariat. After the adoption of the draft resolution, statements in explanation of position were made by the representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Belgium and Japan. The representative of the Secretariat also made a statement (see A/C.5/51/SR.46).

III. RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

7. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

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The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences,[2]

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, 47/202 A to D of

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[2] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 32 and corrigendum and addendum (A/51/32 and Corr.1 and Add.1).

22 December 1992, 48/222 A and B of 23 December 1993, 49/221 A to D of 23 December 1994 and 50/206 A to F of 23 December 1995,

1. Notes with appreciation the work and the report of the Committee on Conferences;

2. Approves the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1997 as submitted[3] and amended by the Committee on Conferences,[4] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1997 that may become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-first session;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to provide all the conference services required as a result of decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, taking into account, as necessary, the procedures established in Assembly resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 42/211 of 21 December 1987;

5. Also requests the Secretary-General to include in the list of official holidays of the United Nations Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha;

6. Decides that no United Nations meetings shall be held on Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, which occur in 1997 on 10 February and 17 April, respectively, and requests the Secretary-General to make the necessary arrangements to ensure strict implementation of this decision when preparing all future draft calendars of conferences and meetings of the United Nations;

7. Decides also that requests for waivers to the headquarters rule contained in General Assembly resolution 40/243 shall be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences prior to consideration by the Assembly;

8. Invites all its subsidiary bodies that are authorized to meet away from their established headquarters to review, in the interest of improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the exception to the headquarters rule in the light of the current situation of their work, and to make recommendations thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session;

9. Invites the Economic and Social Council to request all its subsidiary bodies to carry out the review referred to in paragraph 8 above;

10. Requests the bodies that have not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions, to review their meeting entitlements and to report the results of their review to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences;

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[3] Ibid., Supplement No. 32 and corrigendum (A/51/32 and Corr.1), annex.

[4] Ibid., Supplement No. 32, addendum (A/51/32/Add.1).

11. Expresses concern that the overall and average factors for utilization of conference services have fallen further and were below the established benchmark figure of 80 per cent in 1995;

12. Reiterates its request to the Committee on Conferences, in consultation with the organs concerned, to examine the cases where the utilization factor is lower than the established benchmark figure for at least three sessions, with a view to reporting on problems and factors that have given rise to such a situation, and to make appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources;

13. Expresses concern about underutilization of conference facilities at duty stations outside Headquarters, and emphasizes the need to make the most effective use possible of such facilities;

14. Endorses the initiatives taken by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences with a view to assisting bodies to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources and, to that effect, to assess realistically their need for such resources;

15. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure closer cooperation between Headquarters, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to improve the coordination of conference services;

16. Requests the Secretariat to engage, on a regular basis, in an active dialogue with Member States as a permanent feature at Headquarters, as well as at the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, in order to improve the coordination of conference services;

17. Expresses concern that 35 per cent of requests were denied for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, in view of the importance of these meetings for the smooth functioning of sessional bodies, while recognizing that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority;

18. Urges intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programme of work and to notify Conference Services well in advance of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States;

19. Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to provide, within the resources requested for conference services for the biennium 1998-1999, interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, taking into account the priority due to meetings included in the calendar of conferences and meetings, and to submit a report on the implementation of this decision to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session through the Committee on Conferences;

20. Reaffirms that in the use of conference rooms priority should be given to meetings of Member States;

21. Decides that bodies which accept invitations to convene conferences and meetings in host countries should be kept informed, as appropriate, of the progress made in negotiating the host country agreement in the course of preparations for such a conference or meeting, with a view to encouraging the timely conclusion of such an agreement before the conference or meeting takes place.

B

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions on the control and limitation of documentation, including resolutions 47/202 B of 22 December 1992, 48/222 B of 23 December 1993, 49/221 B of 23 December 1994 and 50/206 B and 50/206 C of 23 December 1995,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General;[5]

2. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to invite Member States to review their document requirements in order to identify the number and types of documents with a view to reducing, where possible, the number and types of documents requested;

3. Also requests the Secretary-General to review the internal requirements of the Secretariat in order to avoid a surplus of documents provided in the Secretariat;

4. Notes that only two intergovernmental bodies have taken positive action in response to paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of resolution 50/206 C;

5. Reiterates its recommendations on control and limitation of documentation made to intergovernmental bodies in resolution 50/206 C, and requests intergovernmental bodies to report to it through the Committee on Conferences on measures taken to implement that resolution;

6. Requests the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to continue to keep it informed, through the Committee on Conferences, of its experience with the use of unedited transcripts;

7. Takes note of the decision of the Committee on Conferences contained in paragraph 89 of its report,[6] and requests the Committee to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on the implementation of that decision;

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[5] A/51/268.

[6] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 32 and corrigendum (A/51/32 and Corr.1).

8. Stresses once again the need for strict compliance with the existing limits of 24 pages for documents originating in the Secretariat and 32 pages for reports of subsidiary bodies;

9. Requests the Secretary-General to submit, every two years through the Committee on Conferences, updated information on the number and length of documents;

10. Also requests the Secretary-General, to the extent possible, to inform bodies, at the time they request reports, whether the documents can be produced within established page limits;

11. Further requests the Secretary-General to pursue his efforts to improve the quality in the substance and presentation of documentation, applying new publishing techniques to enhance readability and reduce consumption of paper;

12. Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents, simultaneously in each of the six official languages of the United Nations;

13. Reaffirms its decision that, should a report be issued late, the reasons for the delay should be indicated when the report is introduced;

14. Reiterates its request to the Joint Inspection Unit to conduct a comprehensive survey of the role publications play in implementing mandates of intergovernmental bodies and the extent to which recurrent publications could be made more cost-effective in this regard, and to submit a report on this matter no later than the end of the fifty-first session.

C

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 50/206 D of 23 December 1995,

Stressing the need to provide Member States and United Nations bodies with more comprehensive and accurate information on the costs of meetings and documentation,

Noting that the introduction of new technologies enhances the quality, cost-effectiveness and efficiency of conference services,

Stressing the importance of equal access to, and benefit from, the optical disk system and other new technologies in all six official languages by all Member States and the need to overcome the difficulties faced by some Member States, in particular developing countries, in acquiring the technology to access the optical disk system, as well as other available technologies,

Welcoming the actions taken by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council to expand and improve

connectivity between United Nations databases and those of Member States, including through their permanent missions, and the training programmes initiated to that end,

Appreciating the relevance of these actions as part of the effort to increase efficiency and to decrease costs,

1. Strongly urges the Secretary-General, as a matter of priority, to develop the cost-accounting system for conference services no later than the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences, having recourse to voluntary and internal expertise within the United Nations system;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to report through the Committee on Conferences to each subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the cost of conference services it utilized in the year concluded in order to enable those organs to plan more effectively;

3. Decides that, in the absence of a General Assembly decision to the contrary, the use of such technologies as the optical disk system and the Internet shall not constitute an alternative to traditional documents;

4. Strongly urges the Secretary-General, as a matter of priority, to provide proposals to the Fifth Committee at the first part of the resumed fifty-first session, in accordance with paragraph 3 of Assembly resolution 50/206 D, on facilitating access by developing countries to the optical disk system in all six official languages, taking into account the possible savings from reduced copying and distribution costs;

5. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of all new public documents, in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations are made available through the United Nations Web site daily and are accessible to Member States without delay;

6. Also requests the Secretary-General to complete the task of uploading all important older United Nations documents on the United Nations Web site on a priority basis, so that these archives are also available to Member States through that medium.

D

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 49/221 C of 23 December 1994 and 50/206 E of 23 December 1995,

1. Notes the efforts made by the translation services to improve the quality of translation of documents in all six official languages of the Organization, and encourages those services to continue to spare no effort to that end and to continue to report to the Committee on Conferences on additional efforts made in this regard;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to pay due attention to the rules of management in translation-related matters.

E

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolutions 49/221 D of 23 December 1994 and 50/206 F of 23 December 1995,

Expresses its appreciation once again to the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for the proper and timely implementation of resolutions 49/221 D and 50/206 F.